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Official Records

15th plenary meeting
Monday, 29 September 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Participation of Palestine in the work of the General Assembly

The President: Before turning to the items on our agenda for today, I should like to draw the attention of delegates to a matter concerning the participation of Palestine in its capacity as observer at this session and in the work of the General Assembly.

In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and 52/250 of 7 July 1998, and with the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/1002, Palestine, in its capacity as observer, will participate in the work of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to any statement.

Address by Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President: The Assembly will hear an address by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Dragan Cović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cović (*spoke in Bosnian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is my great pleasure and honour to address the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. At the outset, allow me, Sir, to extend my sincere congratulations on your election and to wish you every success in presiding over the Assembly at this session.

Even though we entered the new millennium with clear resolve to work for a better future, sharing a vision of global solidarity and common security, which we expressed in the Millennium Declaration, we are witnessing an increase in tragic events, which occur almost daily. The tragedy that took place on 19 August in Baghdad is forcing us to reconsider the true accomplishments and values of civilization today and to re-examine the connections between poverty, development, self-sustainability, respect for human rights and the quest for true progress, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Fully aware of all the global challenges facing us, we must prepare for a long and exhausting campaign — working step by step and tackling one problem at a time — for poverty reduction and the development of underdeveloped countries, and against the scourge of terrorism, organized crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, wherever such threats arise.

The world is yet again faced with new challenges. The United Nations have yet again to make crucial

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decisions in response to them. Poverty, weapons proliferation and AIDS are among the most destabilizing factors on the international scene, as is terrorism. I am sincerely convinced, therefore, that this year's debate on all these issues, especially on the issue of terrorism, will pave the way towards a consensus among Member States on the specific measures to be taken and thus invest the United Nations with new authority, which is so urgently needed to counter threats to international peace, health, stability and collective security.

Allow me to take this opportunity to stress the importance of dialogue to resolve the most pressing issues of today. Dialogue is essential and, it goes without saying, only possible among those who are ready for it. Dialogue based on mutual respect represents a key instrument for the improvement of relations and cooperation among peoples and countries. It is a fundamental condition for the successful outcome of negotiations and reconciliation of differences to reach decisions that are acceptable to all sides.

We in Bosnia and Herzegovina have learned the value of dialogue the hard way. Consider our recent past, during which the lack of dialogue caused misunderstanding, conflicts and hostilities that resulted in the tragic loss of human life, the exodus of young people and the devastation of the economy over the past decade. The entire international community not only witnessed this tragedy but was called on to be actively involved to overcome it.

I can only feel proud that I am addressing the Assembly today as the head of State of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the international community no longer views as a crisis area. Rather, it has become a State that actively participates in stabilization processes in the region and throughout the world. From the Central European Initiative and the South East European Cooperation Process to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Bosnia and Herzegovina is contributing to regional, European and world peace and prosperity. At the same time, committed to reforms, we strive to lay the ground for overcoming the aftermath of recent conflicts and are devoted to respect for the human rights of all individuals and peoples, as well as their cultural, religious and other diversities.

I would like to point out that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are giving priority to advancing the political and economic stability of the country and enhancing its international role through the implementation of planned reforms. I am convinced that we in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in partnership-like cooperation with the High Representative and other representatives of the United Nations and international institutions, will find the best solutions for the implementation of reforms and the most adequate legal solutions for the realization of a faster economic development of the country and the creation of real chances for the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union.

In the process of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to European integration, we have just completed discussions with the European Commission (EC) within the framewo k of the feasibility study. Working on the EC's tasks has been a positive experience in building partnerships with the international community. We are now entering a new phase with full confidence, convinced that the initiated process will result in the final fulfilment of all conditions for membership in the European Union (EU). This comes as a result of the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities to take their destiny into their own hands and to respond to major challenges such as the fight against organized crime and corruption, the strengthening of institutions, conducting legal system reforms, implementation of structural reforms and reduction of the unemployment rate.

We are committed to following the path of proven success strategies in order to overcome as soon as possible our difficult heritage from the past and to start building, with mutual understanding, a modern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only in this way may we pass on to future generations the message of worldwide peace and development, based on mutual understanding and tolerance.

This year Bosnia and Herzegovina took over the chairmanship of the South East European Cooperation Process. We are content with the positive steps taken, both in the stabilization and in the overall development of the Balkan region and integration of the Western Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic structures. I am pleased that mutually harmonized agreements and joint priorities are being fully supported by the EU, by the Stability Pact, by many friendly countries in the world and by international financial and other organizations. I am all the more pleased in view of the fact that the

countries of the region confirm their readiness and commitments to mutual cooperation and the building of good neighbourly and regional relations.

I must stress the fact that there are still many open issues and incomplete tasks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina will succeed in the process of strengthening joint institutions and in establishing a strong legal framework. We are committed to fulfil all Bosnia and Herzegovina's international obligations, particularly those related to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, participation in the world's fight against organized crime, respect of human rights, return of refugees and displaced persons, full implementation of property laws and the return of property to its rightful owners.

Our absolute priority is the fight against terrorism and organized crime, and, at the international level, we are of the view that the United Nations and the Security Council should play the leading role in that fight. Together with other countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina intends to actively tackle this issue, which represents a threat to the entire civilized world. Fully committed to this fight, we in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the assistance of the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which successfully completed its mission last December, have established one of the most modern state border services. In addition, we have improved the legal framework and we are fighting actively against the trafficking of women and children, this modern form of slavery. Our efforts have recently been recognized by the United States Government, and as result, we have been moved to category B.

The issue of missing persons is particularly sensitive and difficult for Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have to make additional efforts, with the assistance of the international community, to at least give the opportunity to grieving families to discover the whereabouts of their loved ones, what happened to them, where they were buried, and to identify their remains and lay them to rest with dignity.

Allow me to point out that Bosnia and Herzegovina is now a much better place for business than it was a year ago, due to the reforms completed during this year in particular. I would like to mention the example of the Bulldozer Committee that redrafted 50 laws and regulations that were discouraging private initiative and suffocating any sense for business. Having created a more favourable legal framework and business environment, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a better place for investment opportunities and employment.

Nevertheless, we must not lie back, we must further accelerate the process of economic reforms. The continuation of the privatization process and further reforms of the judicial system are of utmost importance for creating a more secure business environment in order to open the country to direct foreign investments.

We are in the process of rearranging and simplifying the tax system through the establishment of a single custom system and a value-added tax, thus eliminating corruption and white-collar crime. In order to encourage the entire process of the creation of an investment-friendly environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in February 2004 we will be hosting an international investment conference in Mostar, where we will present the new economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Furthermore, particularly during recent days, we have been finalizing the reforms of the armed forces and the State intelligence service, having realized that a modern security system is a pre-condition for Bosnia and Herzegovina's full participation in common security arrangements, through membership in the Partnership for Peace and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

At this moment we attach paramount importance to reforms and the modernization of the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is our firm belief that, by caring for the individual and by ensuring the collective right to get an education in one's own language and alphabet, we will enhance mutual dialogue and tolerance, in order to preserve the multicultural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Next year we also plan to finalize the reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar, where we are planning once again to celebrate the reunion of both banks of the river and its people. This is our way of sending a global message to all civilizations: this bridge is built of versatile cultural materials, it is an alloy of various traditions and it is the paradigm of a

solution that is possible and evident despite the conflicts and differences in the world. I hereby invite you to make use of this opportunity and make this bridge a symbol of unity for the next year.

Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were held almost a year ago. This time, the international community fully supported the election results. The international community expressed its readiness to support democratic processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and we, the elected authorities, have made our choice through reforms that have as their aim a modern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are committed to taking ownership, to bearing more responsibilities. During his 16 months in office, the High Representative imposed in the first eight months twice as many laws as he did in the second. We are pleased to note the trend of reduction of imposed laws this year, but our ultimate goal is a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is a member of the EU. This Bosnia and Herzegovina has its destiny in the hands of its own citizens and is on the road of no return towards European integration, with more power in the engine of its own institutions and less power in the tow truck of the United Nations High Representative. Above all, this Bosnia and Herzegovina has a constitution cut out to the measure of its peoples and to each and every citizen.

Allow me to conclude by looking into the future. We have presented our candidature for membership in the Security Council for 2010, reaffirming our commitment to build a State that may share its positive experience and participate actively in the world's peace-building, by that time, we hope, within the system of a reformed and reinvigorated United Nations. We are already participating in the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Timor-Leste. We are ready to send our transport unit, military observers and civilian police officers to Liberia.

By the year 2009, we are planning to fulfil the conditions set forth for EU membership, fully committed to the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina based on stability, the rule of law, democracy and a market economy. We are gradually becoming recognized for our implementation of democratic and economic reforms and for harmonizing our priorities with international standards. Next year, from 15 to 17 May 2004 in Sarajevo, we are planning to host the Second Intergovernmental Conference for Children in Europe and Central Asia, together with the Government of Germany and the United Nations Children's Fund. The Conference is the continuation of regional consultations held in Berlin in 2001, and the 2002 General Assembly special session devoted to children.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a sustainable State, albeit with the generous contributions and assistance from the international community, the United Nations and its most prominent leading figures, including the late Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, who will be remembered in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the head of Civil Affairs of the United Nations mission. We remain ever so grateful to those who lent us their hands in times of need and despair.

Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a State well on its way to being part of Europe, with the ambition to create an environment where the return of refugees and displaced persons will not be halted for political or economic reasons, but will be encouraged for reasons of economic prosperity and sustainability that will be achieved through the efforts of all of us.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Mongolia.

Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bagabandi (*spoke in Mongolian; English text provided by the delegation*): May I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the President for his unanimous election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly and express my confidence that under his able stewardship this session will successfully accomplish its mission.

For the 58-year-old United Nations, which has been working throughout to maintain international peace and security, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to foster development and progress, the passing year has proved to be a challenging period. Moreover, we feel deeply concerned that the United Nations and its staff members, who dedicate their lives to helping peoples and countries affected by wars and armed conflicts have turned into targets of terrorist acts. But it is our earnest belief that the noble mission of the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and other United Nations staff members who lost their precious lives while helping and assisting the people of Iraq, will not be in vain.

At the Millennium Summit, held at the turn of a new century, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and proclaimed their firm resolve to work together towards a more efficient and revitalized United Nations.

However, the emergence of a complex international situation and its subsequent developments cast into doubt the ability of the United Nations to develop a fast and adequate response to international crises, to maintain international peace and security, to prevent armed conflicts, to resolve pressing issues in war-torn countries and effectively assist them in building national reconciliation and reconstruction. Even more important, the relevance of the United Nations itself has been put into question.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to reaffirm anew, at the highest level, our shared commitment to implement the Millennium Development Goals unanimously adopted at the Summit and to reiterate the importance of enhancing the role of the United Nations and multilateralism in addressing the formidable challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mongolia has consistently supported the United Nations as the singular world Organization to serve the interests of its Member States and as a principal instrument of multilateral cooperation, given its underlying purposes and principles as well as its universal representation. Mongolia stands for a reformed and revitalized United Nations, adapted to the evolving international realities, for its enhanced role and greater involvement in all areas pertaining to the maintenance of international peace and security, resolution of pressing economic and social issues and promotion of sustainable development.

As its practical contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Mongolia endeavours to provide the relevant personnel to its various missions and supports the efforts to make peace-building missions more effective with an increased emphasis on preventive diplomacy. While emphasizing the increasing importance of ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, my delegation fully endorses the additional measures recently adopted by the Security Council to this effect. Mongolia has signed the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and intends to ratify it in the near future.

My delegation shares the concern over the slow pace of the reform process of the United Nations initiated by the Secretary-General a few years ago. Hence, we believe that there is an urgent need to speed up the reform through identifying innovative approaches so that the United Nations and its Security Council are able to effectively address the challenges ahead.

Mongolia reiterates its support for a just and equitable enlargement of the Security Council by increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent seats and ensuring representation of both developing and developed countries, reviewing the veto power and democratizing working methods of the Security Council through enhancing the openness and transparency of its work. We support the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities entrusted with a mandate to conduct a comprehensive analysis of evolving challenges and ways of strengthening the United Nations.

Some are portraying the contours of today's world as unipolar. Others are challenging this, arguing for a multi-polar world. It seems unreasonable to seek to command humankind and the patterns of its

existence under any particular roof or leadership, or to try to tear it apart into different directions.

In today's world, characterized by globalization and interdependence, it has become increasingly evident that, despite divergent views, we all live in one global village, breathe the same air and share a common future. Mutual understanding and cooperation are becoming the order of the day, rather than division, fragmentation, marginalization or discrimination. Indeed, contemporary human philosophy teaches us not to alienate or estrange, but, rather, to interact and align with one another.

In addition to the traditional threats emanating from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the spread of missile technology and inter- and- intra-State conflicts, non-traditional threats, including terrorism, organized crime, illegal drug trafficking, scarce drinking water, environmental pollution and global climate change, are having adverse effects on regional and international security.

As a State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), conventions banning chemical and biological weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Mongolia deems it important to ensure their universality; to address disarmament issues in a comprehensive manner; to further reduce all types of weapons; to help the Conference on Disarmament to break through its ongoing impasse; and to strengthen monitoring mechanisms for the relevant multilateral treaties and agreements.

As a nuclear-weapon-free country, Mongolia actively supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other parts of the world. Mongolia believes that the nuclear-weapon States should provide security guarantees to non-nuclear-weapon States and States parties to the NPT, and supports the conclusion of a multilateral treaty to that effect.

Mongolia is in favour of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and of a peaceful resolution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme issue. In this regard, we are in favour of continuing the relevant multilateral talks.

Mongolia fully supports the efforts being undertaken by the international community to revive the Middle East peace process and to implement the road map, and supports the establishment of a just and durable peace in the region, on the basis of ensuring the legitimate interests of the parties concerned.

Mongolia shares the concern of other nations over the precarious situation and continued loss of life in Iraq despite the termination of major combat operations. Mongolia is in favour of an increased role and involvement of the United Nations in restoring peace and stability in Iraq and in providing humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people.

With the rapid advance of globalization and technological breakthroughs, we deem it important to create an enabling environment for all countries — especially weak, small or vulnerable economies — equally to benefit from globalization, and for the international community to offer support and assistance to those countries in their social and economic development and to enhance global partnerships for development.

Recent years have been marked by an increased emphasis on social and development issues, resulting in a host of international conferences on sustainable development, financing for development and food security, all organized under the auspices of the United Nations. The speedy implementation, at the national, regional and international levels, of the decisions taken at the social summits, as well as efforts to achieve the goals agreed by the Millennium Summit and at Monterrey, Johannesburg and Rome, have become the top priority of the world community. The recent Cancún Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization has revealed the complexity of the process, leading to a new round of talks on the Doha Development Agenda.

Growing development disparities between haves and have-nots; increasing poverty and unemployment in the developing world, in particular the least developed countries; the spread of HIV/AIDS; the debt burden and trade inequalities, and the further aggravation of such pressing issues remain our immediate cause of concern. We cannot ignore the fact that underdevelopment, poverty and social inequality could serve as a breeding ground for confrontations and armed conflicts. Hence, it has become imperative for the international community to display genuine solidarity and shared responsibility for our common good.

International cooperation is crucial in effectively addressing environmental challenges, including natural

disasters, global climate change, air and water pollution, and desertification. In this respect, small and poor nations warrant greater attention and support.

Mongolia commends the outcome of the first International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in August this year, under the auspices of the United Nations. We consider that the timely and expeditious implementation of the Almaty Plan of Action will help landlocked developing countries to become actively engaged in global economic integration.

Fifty-five years have elapsed since the adoption by the Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The relevance of this fundamental document has stood the test of time, as its underlying ideals have been enshrined in both international treaties and conventions and in national legislation, thus becoming the universal norms of humankind. The ideas contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been carefully integrated into Mongolia's 1992 Constitution, and my country is firmly pursuing policies to consolidate democracy and to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thirteen years ago, Mongolia irreversibly embarked on the road to democracy and has endeavoured to make its own contribution to the cause of promoting democratic ideals. Earlier this month Mongolia hosted the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which resulted in the adoption of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action. More than 600 representatives from 119 countries and a host of international and non-governmental organizations participated in the Conference, thoroughly discussing and sharing their experiences on a wide range of issues under the main theme of "Democracy, Good Governance and Civil Society". It is gratifying to note that the Conference successfully completed its ambitious agenda. My delegation will actively collaborate with others in ensuring effective follow-up to the implementation of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and the Plan of Action at the national, regional and international levels.

The State and Government of Mongolia are pursuing an open and multifaceted foreign policy and undertaking specific measures to consolidate the democratic reforms with a view to ensuring human-centred development and human security, promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, fostering political and economic stability and achieving sustained economic growth.

In conclusion, may I express my confidence that deliberations on the pressing issues before the international community during this session of the General Assembly will be productive and result in sound decisions that contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security and the advancement of social progress and development. In this context, you may rest assured, Sir, of the continued support and full cooperation of my delegation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Mongolia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Natsagiin Bagabandi, President of Mongolia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Shara' (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Hunte on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that his wisdom, as expressed in the policies of his friendly country, will promote constructive dialogue among Member States. In the final analysis, constructive dialogue remains the most valid means of addressing the complex problems currently facing the international community.

It also gives me great pleasure to express to the Secretary-General and his staff our sincere appreciation for the effort they have made and the hardships they have endured in preserving the status of this Organization, and for not submitting to attempts to marginalize it in the international arena. It is with deep sorrow that we recall the great loss that the United Nations in general, and the friendly country of Brazil in particular, suffered as a result of the death of

Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues in the attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last month.

Many leaders and other representatives of the peoples of the world have gathered together at this international forum. That in itself proves beyond any doubt that this edifice of international legitimacy, and the resolutions that are adopted here, remain the most acceptable and respectable political recourse available to the various countries of the world, be they large or small, rich or poor. This is the only forum in which it would be extremely difficult to pass an arbitrary or pre-emptive war resolution that would result in the deaths of innocent civilians and the destruction of their property.

Our world today faces daunting challenges that threaten the very foundation of the system of international peace and security. World leaders are therefore called upon to make a sincere and concerted effort and to demonstrate unwavering political will to commit themselves once again to the principles of international legitimacy. Giving precedence to the logic of force, violating the sovereignty of nations and taking actions that affect people's future compromise legitimacy and the principle of equality. Such policies represent a miscarriage of justice and an abrogation of the rule of law. They will open the door to widespread chaos in international relations and to crises that might be more dangerous than those we are currently facing.

My country believes that the failure to reap the optimal benefits of the remarkable scientific and technological advances that humanity has made in the past two decades, coupled with the failure to achieve globalization with a civilized, human face, have alienated our peoples and heightened their apprehensions. It has obstructed the dialogue among civilizations and blocked further interaction with other cultures. Attempts by some centres of power in the world to manipulate the profound changes that have taken place in the international balance of power in pursuit of narrow national interests have added insult to injury. Cards have been shuffled and premises have been challenged. New concepts that are totally alien to the Charter, such as pre-emptive war and unilateral and illegitimate use of force, have been invented. In brief, that course of action has turned the clock back — contrary to the superficial claims that new prospects were actually being opened.

It is regrettable that in the twenty-first century some think tanks provide decision-makers with misleading or false information on the basis of which wars are waged outside the context of international legitimacy and blood is shed. Accusations are made that completely lack credibility, and unbridled claims are advanced in deliberate disregard of any logic developed by States and peoples throughout their history.

Our region — the cradle of the divine religions and the storehouse of two thirds of the world's oil reserves — has been victimized more than any other, suffering greater injustice, being subjected to more disinformation campaigns and enduring greater use of force than any other region. It has to endure a great many external threats that continually lay waste its potential and its material and intellectual resources. No sooner had the peoples of the region begun to enjoy their freedom and independence than they found themselves once again faced with violent and unjust challenges — challenges that are worse than any they have known throughout their history.

The scourge of the Israeli occupation and continued Israeli aggression has been the main reason for the suffering of our region since the concept of international legitimacy first emerge in the international community. That is the concept on which the Organization was founded and which it came to epitomize. There is a profound paradox that has become the hallmark of our region. Israel was the first State to acquire its legitimacy through a resolution adopted by the United Nations, yet Israel was also the first State to ride roughshod over international legitimacy — and it has continued to do so to the extent that Arabs and many others around the world feel as if Israel were a country above the law, one that enjoys the same veto power in the Security Council as the United States.

It is regrettable that, after decades of occupation, bloodshed and contempt for international legitimacy, the representative of Israel has yet to realize that the road to peace lies in Israel's implementation of the 37 Security Council resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the nearly 600 General Assembly resolutions on the same subject, all of which have so far remained hostage to Israeli defiance of international law.

It behoved the Israeli Foreign Minister to explain in his statement to the international community in this Hall a few days ago the reasons for his country's refusal to implement this enormous number of resolutions of international legitimacy on the Middle East, instead of ignoring them, considering them null and void, items of the past. Are the Syrians, the Lebanese and the Palestinians unrealistic in their demands, or are they asking for the impossible when they stress that the only way out of the spiral of violence and bloodshed is through ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, through negotiations to pursue a comprehensive, just and lasting peace on the basis of implementing United Nations resolutions and the Arab Summit peace initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002?

The nagging core question here is how much longer Israel continue can to mislead some into believing that it is being victimized while it continues to occupy the territory of others by force, lay siege to Palestinians, destroy their homes, uproot their trees and assassinate them in their occupied land. When did the victims of occupation, settler colonialism and population transfer become outlaws and terrorists without a just cause, whose killing by fighter jets and tank fire became sanctioned under the pretext of self-defence?

Some people in Washington have asked "Why do they hate us?" Some authors with ulterior motives, or self-proclaimed pundits writing for reputable American newspapers or appearing on famous television programmes, volunteer their answers: "They hate us because we have skyscrapers and noble values." They choose to ignore that what is hated are the flawed policies, and not the country and its beautiful landmarks and cherished cultural and humanitarian values.

The grave situation in Iraq has become a source of serious concern for our people, who are already plagued by Israeli occupation and continued threats against them. The situation is also a major cause of concern for the international community due to the threat it poses to international peace and security. The credibility of our Organization suffered greatly when the United Nations was unable to prevent the war against Iraq, a war waged outside the context of international legitimacy.

For weeks and months, the Security Council was drawn into bitter strife, debating the war resolution prior to the war. The marathon report of the inspectors came out before the inspectors had accomplished the tasks entrusted to them. That situation notwithstanding, most of the members of the Council were able to stay the course, upholding international legitimacy and the Charter. The war was ultimately waged outside the framework of international legitimacy and those members chose not to its burden.

Along with other neighbouring countries, Syria remained committed to the principles of international legitimacy and the Charter. In an unprecedented démarche, our countries unanimously stressed their common concern that, should this war break out, its repercussions on regional security and international peace would be more devastating than the precarious situation prevailing in Iraq at the time.

That said, Syria does not base its foreign policy on hatred, nor do we gloat over the misfortunes of others. We do not redefine our policy in response to threats either. The real challenge, we believe is how to extricate Iraq from this predicament and mobilize all efforts to win the battle for peace in post-war Iraq.

Our country is directly concerned with developments in Iraq, given our historical and geographic ties and our common national loyalties to the Iraqi people. Syria affirms that finding the way out of this predicament does not lie in focusing on addressing the lack of security in Iraq, thereby increasing the number of troops and using force to bring about security, or on levelling accusations at neighbouring countries. The way out lies in an international commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, setting a clear timetable for the withdrawal of the occupying forces from Iraq as soon as possible, drafting a constitution accepted by the Iraqis and establishing a Government that is representative of the Iraqi people, provided that the United Nations plays a pivotal role in Iraq in the various political, security and economic fields.

This session of the Assembly has seen intensive discussion among the permanent and elected members of the Security Council on a new draft resolution on Iraq. We must draw attention here to the requirement that any draft resolution to be adopted by the Security Council should allay the misgivings of the Iraqi people in all their factions and affiliations. Therefore, the draft

resolution to be adopted by the Security Council must be brought to full maturity, so as to reassure the Iraqi people about their future and to guarantee their independence and sovereignty over their land and resources. The members of the Security Council should unanimously accept such a resolution, and it must enjoy the support of neighbouring States and the international community.

Much has been said lately about the dangers of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — paid by countries that already have different types of such weapons. Some have even waged a war under the pretext of eliminating such weapons. As is already known, this danger is not confined to a particular region in the world, but can be found in many other regions. What is truly regrettable, however, is that some international quarters selectively choose to level false accusations against certain Arab and Islamic States, but not against others, while ignoring the Israeli arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Also ignored have been the repeated appeals by all the countries of the region, with the exception of Israel, to make the Middle East a region free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Syria this year translated its words into action by submitting an integrated draft resolution to the Security Council, calling for declaring the Middle East a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. It is not surprising, however, that those who led the media campaign against Syria stood in the way of adoption of the Syrian initiative.

Syria is aware that its membership in the Security Council is temporary. However, we appeal to the international community to continue to support the Syrian initiative calling for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East region.

Syria has condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We have supported the Security Council's efforts to counter international terrorism throughout the time of our membership of the Council. Syria has also acceded to the relevant international conventions to combat terrorism, including the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism. Both instruments define the crime of terrorism and distinguish between terrorism and the legitimate right of people under foreign occupation to resist occupation, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Syria, which is not pursuing any political agenda, believes that the international community's success in its overall battle against terrorism depends, to a large extent, on its success in addressing the root causes of terrorism, which are often found in poverty, ignorance and injustice. First and foremost, eliminating injustice requires an end to foreign occupation.

As a member of the Security Council, Syria has contributed to all the deliberations on the situation in Africa. Syria has also presided over Council meetings that were dedicated in full to finding solutions to the predicaments of the friendly people of Africa. On more than one level, the Council has succeed in providing assistance to Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Angola and Sierra Leone. My county would like to express its satisfaction at the positive developments that have made it possible to find peaceful solutions to African questions, which have guaranteed the security, stability and territorial integrity of the African States concerned. Syria expresses its total solidarity with the African continent. We call upon industrialized States and others able to do so to provide assistance to the countries of that great continent.

Syria also expresses its satisfaction with the progress made in the Sudanese peace talks, with the signing of the agreement on security and ceasefire arrangements, and ultimately with the comprehensive agreement that will end the conflict in that fraternal country in a way that would preserve the Sudan's unity and territorial integrity.

We call for a total lifting of the embargo imposed on Cuba for decades outside the context of international legitimacy.

We also welcome the international efforts to defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula, and support the Korean people's legitimate aspirations to unity and prosperity.

Acting upon the collective responsibility of Member States to promote the role of this international Organization, Syria has actively participated in the deliberations on the reform of the United Nations. In that regard, the Millennium Declaration, which was

adopted three years ago, represented a good basis, all things considered, to bring about that reform. We hope that the reform will continue to be carried out in a comprehensive, transparent and non-selective manner. We believe that, in cooperation with the Secretariat, Member States have a primary role to play in the consultations on reform and in the decisions to be taken accordingly.

The President returned to the Chair.

In conclusion, our sense of the daunting responsibility that we must shoulder together as members of this international Organization should prompt us to raise some rhetorical questions. Do we have at our disposal a better option than to enhance the purposes and principles of the Charter and to pursue the goal of reforming the Organization for the establishment of a more just and more democratic international order? Should we not persevere to safeguard the milestone achievements of international law? Should we not aspire to a system that will not accommodate the arrogance of power nor compromise our fundamental principles? Should we not seek a system that pursues fruitful cooperation among States and encourages openness and a dialogue among civilizations epitomizing the essence of a creative human interaction?

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Cyril Svoboda, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Svoboda (Czech Republic): Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, and to wish you every success in your important position. It is a pleasure to see as President a representative of Saint Lucia, the smallest country ever to hold the office. That fact upholds the Charter principle of the sovereign equality of nations in this important world body, as well as the desirability of universal membership in the United Nations, where all countries, large and small, have something to contribute.

I also take this opportunity, Sir, to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his work and efforts devoted to the activities of the United Nations throughout the past year. It was a great honour for the Czech Republic to preside over the General Assembly and to use that unique opportunity to further enhance the United Nations capacity and ability to respond to current global challenges.

Let me also express my country's deepest sympathies to all who have lost loved ones in terrorist attacks, including the attack on the United Nations building in Baghdad, which claimed the lives of the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and a number of his co-workers. We view that horrible act as an attack against the principles of freedom, democracy and peace, the principles on which our Organization is built.

The United Nations effort aimed at the stabilization, democratization and reconstruction of Iraq has the full support of my country, and I appreciate the bold and selfless work done by the staff of the United Nations. The United Nations plays an irreplaceable role in that field. We therefore support the idea of adopting a new Security Council resolution that would provide a framework for the widest possible participation of other countries. The Czech Republic will actively participate in that process, and is determined to continue its engagement.

The recent terrorist attacks in Iraq and other regions of the Middle East strengthen our conviction that the international community must not give in to terrorist threats. On the contrary, we must combine and intensify our efforts to combat them. The success of cooperation between the United Nations, the Coalition Provisional Authority and Iraqi representatives in stabilizing the situation in Iraq and handing over the country's administration to the Iraqi people will be the essential step in that direction. The Czech Republic therefore welcomes the establishment of the Governing Council, the appointment of provisional ministers and the continued work on drafting a constitution, and is interested in the speedy creation of a stable Government in Iraq that will honour its international commitments and respect human rights and freedoms and the fundamental principles of democracy. But that is not something than can happen overnight, as we know from our own experience. The transition from dictatorship to a functioning democracy takes some time.

We believe that progress in the Middle East peace process based on the road map must be at the centre of the efforts of the whole international community. We should not allow extremist and terrorist groups to dominate its agenda, as recent developments have

shown. At the same time, we call upon all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint in taking actions that may contradict the achievement of a peaceful political settlement of the crisis, especially extrajudicial killings and suicide bombings.

The Czech Republic supports activities aimed at reviving and continuing the implementation of the peace plan. In their talks, the Quartet and the parties concerned must take stock of the peace plan and identify obstacles on the road to peace, as well as outstanding tasks before the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Without proper implementation, the road map will suffer the same fate as those of the numerous peace initiatives we have seen in the past.

The problems of the Middle East are very complex. My country would like to emphasize three basic issues in this fragile phase that we consider crucial for the implementation and success of the road map for peace, namely, the security aspects of a peace settlement, the consistent suppression of all manifestations of terrorism and the consolidation and strengthening of the position of the Palestinian Government and its process of reform, including concrete steps to confront terror and violence.

In our view, tangible changes in the situation on the ground should be an inseparable part of those efforts. At the same time, with their vision of their own independent State, Palestinians should feel that their economic and humanitarian situation is improving. The Czech Republic is prepared to assume its share of responsibility in the efforts to improve the economic situation of Palestinian autonomous territories at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

The restoration of ethnic peace, the strengthening of stability and economic growth remain the main objectives of the international community in the crisis regions of the Balkans. In the present circumstances, the maintenance of an international presence in the region is still a necessary prerequisite for the development of democracy and the strengthening of peace. The United Nations and other international organizations must exercise their control function even more systematically, use their experience in assisting in the transformation of society, ensure the active participation of all ethnic groups in the area of administration, create conditions for the safe return of refugees, help with development of local economies and curb organized crime.

I am convinced that Mr. Harri Holkeri, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, will further contribute to the achievement of the declared objectives. The transfer of competencies from the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo to local authorities must, at the same time, include the transfer of responsibilities for the achievement of the objectives set by the international administration and, above all, the creation of conditions for the safe return of refugees. For the sake of the functioning of a multi-ethnic society, it is also necessary to ensure the active participation of all ethnic groups in the administration of the province.

The Czech Republic supports all international efforts in the field of disarmament and arms control, including verification of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. That process is a long-term priority of Czech foreign policy. The Czech Republic devotes considerable attention to the relevant international treaties and conventions in that regard and takes an active part in addressing security problems. We are convinced that it is necessary to promote and strengthen universal adherence to the three major multilateral agreements relating to weapons of mass destruction, namely, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. In that connection, we also support the promotion of an early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Particular emphasis should be placed on establishing effective verification mechanisms, namely, for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

We consider the Additional Protocol to the NPT, which creates an integral part of the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system and strengthens the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to be a very important element of the verification system. That is why it is urgent for the States that have not entered into safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency to do so and to fulfil their obligations under article III of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We believe that the Additional Protocol should be made the standard for all NPT signatory States.

The problems associated with the current conflicts severely affecting civilian populations are closely connected with the issue of conventional weapons, especially as regards small arms and light weapons. The Czech Republic supports the international community in its efforts to prevent the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and their uncontrolled proliferation.

The Czech Republic very much welcomes the fact that the international community is increasingly sensitized to the observance and protection of human rights. There is a growing body of globally recognized human rights and most cases of human rights violations are strongly criticized by the democratic international community. Nevertheless, it would be too daring to assume that criticism by the international community can always mitigate the consequences of a human rights violation. However, the fact that most entities in international law lay stress on human rights is unquestionably a positive aspect. I would therefore like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Czech Republic to call for the release of all prisoners of conscience in various parts of the world, as well as to call for the observance of their fundamental human rights.

In the light of recent developments, I consider it necessary to again mention the Nobel Peace Prize laureate from Myanmar, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, and the numerous Cubans who were sentenced to many years in prison in the political trials of March and April 2003. Those and similar cases only deepen the isolation of the countries concerned and do not solve the existing situations.

The Czech Republic remains fully committed to the United Nations and is aware of the fact that the United Nations is a universal international organization that plays an irreplaceable role in the present globalized world. We support the Millennium Declaration as the basis for the reform of the entire United Nations system and as a further step towards the strengthening of the Organization's authority, operational capability and effective functioning. We support in particular the initiatives of the Secretary-General aimed at improving the management and administration of the United Nations. Another important task is to proceed with the revitalization of the General Assembly, including such areas as the clustering of agenda items.

The reform of the Security Council represents a crucial element in the development of international relations in the new millennium. The Czech Republic shares the majority view that the composition of the Council is outdated, that it reflects the realities of the Second World War rather than those of today and that it should be adjusted to the current state of affairs. The present situation is unsustainable and undermines the legitimacy of the United Nations, and therefore calls for urgent action. The Czech Republic will continue to support inevitable reform steps, including the enlargement of the Council in both categories of membership. In particular, we support the aspirations of Germany and Japan for permanent seats, as well as the allocation of another three new permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform the General Assembly of the decision of the Government of the Czech Republic Government to present its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2008-2009 as our contribution to safeguarding international peace and security.

I welcome the President's intention to focus the Assembly's attention on the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations summits and conferences held during the past decade and on the United Nations development agenda, including the Millennium Declaration Goals. The Czech Republic emphasizes the importance of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals as an overarching platform for specific actions to achieve specific goals and targets. Actions at the national, regional and international levels are necessary to fight poverty, improve access to health services and water, combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, provide education, bridge the digital divide and preserve the environment, to name only a few of our many concerns. At the same time, efforts to achieve development goals complement efforts to achieve sustainable development, including its economic, social and environmental aspects. The Czech Republic believes that a focus on multilateral and international cooperation is indispensable to the success of the United Nations development agenda. We are therefore prepared to continue to contribute to that important process.

As regards the strategic document entitled the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in which, for the first time in their history, African

States assumed responsibility for their further development, the Czech Republic is well aware that support for that document must be translated into action as soon as possible. An active and constructive approach should be reflected in all horizontal activities of the international community. That is why the Czech Republic regards the principle of good governance as one of NEPAD's key principles that can substantially contribute to the establishment of suitable conditions for the integration of African States into ongoing globalization processes and to the creation of a favourable climate for the continent's further development.

As an acceding country to the European Union, the Czech Republic is prepared to assume its part in the implementation of the African policy that is part of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In conclusion, let me stress that the challenge posed by security has likely been the most bitter and forceful to arise in the global community in the past two years. In that regard, we face a real test of our will and ability to cooperate, and in that connection the United Nations remains an irreplaceable forum for conflict prevention and a legal platform for the taking of multilateral steps to preserve the world's security and peace. In that respect, we very much support the Secretary-General's call for the strengthening of multilateralism, as international security cannot be fully achieved by single States or coalitions dealing with threats for the rest of the world.

Humankind has not been challenged in such terms in all of its history. I am not referring solely to terrorism or nuclear threats, but also to various epidemics, poverty and the worsening environment, which are themselves the root causes of conflicts. Furthermore — and we are now witnessing this in Iraq — reactive military actions, both targeted and of short duration, are part of the solution, but they do not provide the whole remedy. There is an irreplaceable role for the world community to play. We, the Member States of the United Nations community, should together therefore focus our utmost attention on efficient measures to make our planet secure and prosperous for present and future generations.

The President: Before I call on the next speaker, may I again ask for the Assembly's cooperation and support with respect to telephones. I ask members to please set their phones to vibrate, because they do cause terrible disturbances for speakers. Please assist as best you can by setting your cellular phones on vibrate. I do not want you to lose your calls, but they should not disturb speakers.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar.

Mr. Aung (Myanmar): Allow me, at the outset, to extend my warm felicitations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Your vast experience and diplomatic skills augur well for the success of our deliberations. I would also like to express our gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his invaluable contribution to the success of the previous session of the General Assembly. We also pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts in leading the Organization through challenging times.

We are meeting at a time when the world is facing daunting challenges. In addition to the perennial problems of extreme poverty, the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation, we are faced with the challenge posed by new forms of terrorism. We must confront all those challenges squarely if we are to fulfil the vision of global prosperity and collective security set out in the Declaration of the Millennium Summit, three years ago.

The United Nations has a vital role to play in ensuring peace and security. Myanmar firmly believes that the Organization must be revitalized to accomplish our objectives. We cannot overcome the complex problems that beset our world without universal commitment to multilateralism and a reaffirmation of faith in the central role of the United Nations in the promotion of global peace and security. The importance of multilateralism and the need for countries to strictly abide by the principles of international law cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, Member States, both large and small, have an interest and a responsibility to uphold the Charter of the United Nations.

More than ever before, our world needs greater international solidarity and cooperation. In that respect, we welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations into a more effective Organization.

My delegation also shares the Secretary-General's concern that the pre-emptive use of force could set precedents that could result in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification.

Recent attacks by terrorists in Baghdad, Bali, Casablanca, Jakarta, Jerusalem, Mumbai and other places serve to remind us of the grim fact that the fight against terrorism is not over. It is evident that the use of force alone cannot wipe out terrorism. If we wish to achieve enduring results, we must address such fundamental problems as the persistence of extreme poverty, the disparity of income between and within countries, racial and religious prejudice and attempts by some countries to impose their values on small and developing countries.

Terrorism poses a common threat to humankind. It respects neither borders nor religion nor race. All nations must therefore join hands to meet the challenge posed by terrorists. It is only through increased cooperation at the national, regional and international levels that we can hope to overcome that menace. I wish to reiterate that Myanmar is against all forms of terrorism. We have had bitter experiences with terrorism in our own country and we are firmly committed to work with the international community to prevent, counter and eliminate that terrible scourge of humankind.

Last month, terrorists brought their war to the doorsteps of our Organization when they attacked the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. They took the lives of 22 people, including that of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the most outstanding international civil servants. We join the rest of the world in paying tribute to his memory and profess our profound sadness over the loss of the life of the Special Representative, and of other lives, in that unwarranted attack.

I would now like to turn to recent political developments in my country. Some have accused us of deliberately creating a political impasse in order to delay the transfer of power. If one takes a close and objective look at the situation in the country, one will see that what needs to be done to effect a smooth transition to democracy is, first and foremost, to have the political will to do so. Let me assure the General Assembly that we have that political will. We are firmly committed to bringing about a systematic transformation to democracy. In the past, successive Governments in Myanmar failed in their attempts to build a multiparty democratic system, because they were unable to overcome the fundamental issues facing the nation, namely, the issues of peace and stability, national unity among all national races — which number more than 100 — economic development and human resources development. Attempts were made without first solving those fundamental problems; the country drifted and the people suffered.

The present Government, aware of the fact that fundamental issues must first be addressed, adopted a different approach. It laid down four political objectives: first, to establish peace and stability in the whole nation and to ensure the prevalence of law and order; secondly, to consolidate unity among all national races; thirdly, to strive for a durable Constitution; and, fourthly, to build a modern and democratic nation in keeping with the new Constitution.

At the outset, an olive branch was extended to the armed groups that had been fighting the Government for decades. Following successful negotiations, those groups returned to the legal fold. National unity was achieved. Peace now reigns in the entire country, providing an opportunity for long-neglected border areas to develop quickly. The gap between urban and rural areas has been narrowed. At the same time, we have taken developmental initiatives to promote a better life for our peoples. We have worked tirelessly to provide better health care, education and housing for all our peoples. We have had to rebuild the country from scratch.

Those who come to Myanmar will be able to observe at first hand the immense transformations taking place in the country. As the adage goes, seeing is believing. Today our people can look forward to the future with confidence and renewed hope. Now that firm foundations have been laid, we have moved on to the next phase to commence work on the drafting of a new Constitution and to build a modern democratic nation in keeping with it.

The new Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, who was appointed on 25 August 2003, outlined a road map for the transition to democracy. The seven-step programme includes, first, the reconvening of the National Convention, which has been adjourned since 1996; secondly, after the successful holding of the National Convention, the step-by-step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a

genuine and disciplined democratic system; thirdly, the drafting of a new Constitution in accordance with basic principles and the detailed basic principles to be laid down by the National Convention; fourthly, the adoption of the Constitution through a national referendum; fifthly, the holding of free and fair elections for *pyithu hluttaws*, or legislative bodies, according to the new Constitution; sixthly, the convening of *hluttaws* attended by *hluttaw* members in accordance with the new Constitution; and, seventhly, the building of a modern, developed and democratic nation by the State leaders elected by the *hluttaw*, the Government and other central organs formed by the *hluttaw*. All strata of the country's population have adopted a unified approach and supported the road map.

In recent weeks, Myanmar has taken substantial steps on the road to democracy. It is important that the international community recognize those positive changes; credit must be given where credit is due. Myanmar is working to ensure an environment in which we can achieve our objectives. The people of Myanmar are enthusiastic about consolidating the progress achieved thus far. At the same time, we seek to maintain good and friendly relations with all countries in the region and in the rest of the world so that we can thrive and prosper. We have never posed a security threat to any neighbour, and we have always sought to promote regional peace and stability and the common weal of all our nations.

It is disconcerting that some countries have chosen to turn a blind eye to reality and have subjected Myanmar to a wide array of unfair economic sanctions for their own political ends. Those unilateral coercive measures not only go against the spirit and the letter of the Charter of the United Nations, but also violate international law and rules of international trade. They are intrinsically unfair and only add to the hardships of people already marginalized by globalization. Countries that place a high premium on democracy and human rights have a responsibility to live up to those noble ideals in their relations with others. Our common aspirations to peace and development can be fulfilled only if nations avoid double standards and adopt a more positive attitude.

We live in challenging and dangerous times. Conflicts and tensions in various parts of the world threaten global peace and security. Transnational crimes and new forms of terrorism also add to our problems. Yet it is in our power to make the world a better place. Here, it is pertinent to recall what I stated last year in this hallowed Hall: if we want to ensure a better future for mankind, we must heed the teachings of the world's great religions. Every religion calls for tolerance, understanding and compassion for fellow human beings. Only when we can overcome anger and hatred and do away with false pride and prejudice will we succeed in establishing a world in which peace and justice prevail.

All conflicts, rivalries and hostilities have their roots in hatred and enmity. We must try to overcome them. We should all try to build a global order where the strong will not impose their will on the weak and where democracy prevails not only within nations, but also in the international arena. Let us work together, as a family of nations, to overcome the serious common challenges that we face.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Maher El Sayed, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mr. Maher El Sayed (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, I should like to convey to you, both personally and in your capacity as a representative of your country, Saint Lucia, my sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that you will lead its work with efficiency and skill. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his remarkable and effective contribution to the results achieved during the last session, results we value and seek to deepen further.

We meet today at a critical juncture in world history. More than ever before, we need to chart and define clearly the path we wish to take to avert the confusion of concepts and the undermining of established principles. Doubts have been raised about the United Nations and its role; attempts have been made to circumvent it and ignore the fact that it was born out of the world's tragic experience in the first half of the previous century. From that experience, the world drew the necessary lessons concerning the need for collective action to solve problems, to prevent wars and to enable peoples to rule themselves and to cooperate for a better future.

I believe that the time is now past for such doubts. Everyone has come to realize the importance of

taking action through the Organization in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity. That is the only way to save the world from new divisions and scourges. That new development places new responsibilities on us all to cooperate within the United Nations in a spirit that seeks unity rather than division, cooperation rather than conflict, real solutions to problems rather than ways of addressing them without justice and respect for the Charter, thus lacking legitimacy and effectiveness.

Commitment to the Charter and to international law is the safety valve for the international community. The role of the United Nations cannot be reduced to the role of the Security Council alone and to the questions that it can or cannot address. In our opinion, the United Nations is much larger than that; its contributions embrace all the elements of the wide-ranging and complex international agenda.

In that regard, we reiterate that challenges such as terrorism and illicit drugs, diseases, disarmament, protection of the environment, AIDS and achieving sustainable development can be met only through coordinated action in which all States, large and small, act within an international framework that enjoys legitimacy and is conducive to the attainment of common objectives.

In that connection, I should like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished role and his continuing efforts in strengthening the purposes and principles of the United Nations to enable the Organization to shoulder its responsibilities and to achieve its goals. Kofi Annan played a significant role in returning the Organization to the centre of events. In the course of United Nations efforts to carry out its noble principles, many of its staff members lose their lives. In the recent tragic events in Baghdad, Egypt lost two of its and brave nationals who had been working ably in the service of the Organization's principles.

Tragic events have struck many countries and peoples. Foremost among them were the events of 11 September 2001, which afflicted the friendly people of the United States of America — events that we fully condemn and deplore. In the midst of the agony and anxiety generated by such events, inescapable conclusions have been reached: we must unite in combating terrorism on realistic, sound and legitimate bases; we must avoid confusing terrorism with certain legitimate acts that are inspired by the wish to break the shackles of occupation, domination and injustice; and we must understand that the desire to combat terrorism must not become the only yardstick for judgement.

Experience has proven that in combating terrorism we must not fail to see that it is not a product of one of the world's major cultures. We must not ignore the fact that terrorism is not confined to a certain region and that the fight against it must not be restricted to the perspective of security or politics alone. Terrorism is by nature a multifaceted phenomenon. As such, it must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner that encompasses its political, economic, security, legal and psychological aspects, as well as the conditions exploited by some to justify it.

The United Nations has proven its ability to coordinate international efforts and to achieve tangible results in this field. Egypt has participated seriously in all activities aimed at strengthening international efforts against terrorism. This has been Egypt's objective all along. In 1995, Egypt launched President Hosni Mubarak's initiative to convene a high-level international conference under United Nations auspices to consider ways and means to combat terrorism. This initiative gave expression to Egypt's keen interest in supporting the international efforts aimed at reaching a clear and precise understanding of the fight against terrorism, including through special negotiations on the comprehensive convention to combat international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The Egyptian initiative must not be construed as a chance for protracted polemics or disagreement that clouds our objective. On the contrary, it is a call to frame a document that expresses the international political will and reflects the international resolve to eradicate the scourge of terrorism, to restore peace and security, along with justice and stability, and to clarify the responsibilities of each and every member of the international community.

Our world today is facing numerous challenges regionally and internationally. There are challenges to the logic of fairness, justice and peace and challenges related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the slow pace of international action in the field of nuclear disarmament. We are witnessing tendencies to consecrate the right to possess, develop, and modernize nuclear weapons. Some States still cling to the obsolete doctrines of deterrence and attempt to find justifications for the use of nuclear weapons.

Therefore, it has become necessary to widen the establishment of zones that are free of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, I recall Egypt's repeated assertions, in all international forums, that rendering the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, in a comprehensive framework that applies to all without exception or discrimination, is the only way to spare the region and the world the dangers that threaten all our achievements and all that we strive to achieve. It is unacceptable that Israel's possession of such weapons should remain a reality that some prefer to ignore or should prevent the international community in Vienna, New York or elsewhere from facing it fairly and squarely.

The Middle East region continues to suffer from the absence of peace. There were high hopes that the historical reconciliation between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples was within reach after the Oslo accords, the parties' mutual recognition and the subsequent agreements and negotiations. Yet the efforts failed every time, seemingly because the Israeli party does not yet fully share the conviction of all, expressed by President George Bush and the Quartet, that the solution lies in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, that would live side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The Palestinian people continue to be subjected to oppression, provocation, and aggression. They continue to languish under the oppression of a cruel and unfair occupation that generates feelings of despair and frustration and leads to a spiral of violence and counter-violence whose victims are innocent civilians.

It is high time for the international community to reiterate its call to the parties to return to the negotiating table in order to implement the principles of international legality and to achieve a just peace in the entire Middle Eastern region on the basis of a complete withdrawal to the 1967 borders and of respect for rights. Egypt has continually made efforts to achieve that objective in Palestine, the Govan and in the occupied Lebanese territories, confident that the logic of peace will prevail over the logic of aggression and that the resolve of the people who yearn for a peace that achieves security and opens the door for development will prevail over those who continue to harbour ambitions of expansion and aggression and thus put the interests of their peoples in danger. They will bear a heavy responsibility for that.

The situation in Iraq is cause for grave concern. We reaffirm anew the need for respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Iraq, as well as the need to create conditions conducive to the earliest possible withdrawal of the occupying forces and the assumption by the United Nations of a central role in assisting the Iraqis in the political and economic reconstruction of their State. Egypt affirms its readiness to contribute to the reconstruction process, in accordance with the wishes and needs of the Iraqi people and in cooperation with the rest of the international community, under the aegis of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when the aspirations of the Iraqi people are realised and when it becomes an effective and free partner working with its Arab brothers for a better future.

Egypt welcomes the recent agreement between the government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), an agreement that paves the way for a consolidated effort towards a better future for the people of a united Sudan and one that ensures equality, security and prosperity for all its citizens. Egypt calls upon the international community to assist in securing the implementation of this agreement. The profound and eternal ties and relations between Egypt and the Sudan and our firm belief in the commonality of the hopes we entertain and the threats we face impel us to be in the vanguard of action for the achievement of that lofty goal. It alone can guarantee the maintenance of the interests of the Sudanese people as a whole, as well as the interests of the Arab world and the African continent.

Egypt believes that cooperation for development is the cornerstone of multilateral international action. The eradication of poverty is a moral, human, and political responsibility shared by the countries of the North and the South. It is the shortest route to achieving international peace and security. A fair look at the international economic situation must conclude that it is impossible to accept the continuation of the current imbalance in the distribution of wealth among the peoples of the Earth. Equally impossible to accept are the lack of democracy in international economic decision-making, the grave fluctuations in the efficiency of the work of the world financial markets, the unfair trade practices against the interests of developing countries and the policies that lead to recurrent financial crises which eliminate, in a few days, the achievements of decades of great sacrifice.

We regret that the Cancún Conference was unable to produce the desired and previously agreed outcome of affording developing countries a real opportunity to benefit from liberalization based on balanced trade. Instead, it made liberalization an obstacle to the efforts of developing countries to promote growth and development under difficult and complex circumstances.

Egypt has welcomed the outcome of United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Summit Declaration, and has called for full implementation of the letter and spirit of the decisions adopted. Hence, we view with satisfaction the decision of the General Assembly at its last session to consider in 2005 at a high level the implementation of the outcomes of international summits and conferences.

Globalization, with the hope it brings for international cooperation that benefits all, could turn, if misused, into an attempt at domination, thereby exacerbating the structural flaws in the international system at both the economic and political levels. Hence, there is a need for measures to increase the effectiveness of international institutions and to achieve good governance, which is as necessary on the international level as it is on the national level, and to create a favourable economic environment. There is also a need to adopt a comprehensive package of reforms that includes international finance and for mutual respect among cultures and civilizations so that dialogue and cooperation can benefit all and can promote understanding between nations and peoples.

While urging the United Nations to continue its efforts in the promotion of international cooperation for development, Egypt stresses the importance of taking the cultural diversity of societies into account. It is also important to seek acceptance of the other as an equal partner in discourse without the imposition of certain models. At the same time, we reiterate that this cooperation must be the fruit of a new philosophy that posits the common destiny of mankind in a unified and interactive manner, whereby if one part suffers, the rest will subsequently suffer. The repercussions of the economic and social problems in a given country or continent can no longer be confined to a single place. Rather, these repercussions now swiftly find their way to the rest of the world.

The United Nations should place the situation in Africa among its top priorities, in view of the political, economic, social, and environmental challenges facing it, as well as the outbreak of armed conflicts, spread of deadly epidemics and plunder of the riches and resources of peoples, whether directly or indirectly through the imbalance in trade and economic relations.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) constitutes a new starting point to change the standard of living in Africa. It is an initiative created by the Africans themselves, based on their own vision of their reality, needs and the great hopes of the African peoples for a better future and their wish to be partners with the world for the sake of development and progress. Egypt reaffirms the need to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly last year, which took NEPAD as a framework for development in Africa. Egypt calls for the development programmes of international organizations to be adapted to the priorities set by NEPAD. Egypt urges donor countries and economic organizations and institutions to provide support to the African countries for the implementation of NEPAD and the achievement of its desired objectives.

African countries have already established within the African Union the machinery required for the implementation of the initiative. The international community is called upon to help bridge the financial gap that impedes the achievement of poverty reduction in Africa. This should be done through a prompt and comprehensive approach.

Egypt's belief in the centrality of the role of the United Nations in the world, now and in the future, impels it to reaffirm the urgent need to develop and increase the Organization's effectiveness. This includes the reform of its main organs, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council. We all agree that there is a need for reform and that this reform is a long process. Many of the steps towards reform have been implemented. However, much remains to be done to strengthen collective and international action through the revitalization of the General Assembly and reform of the working methods of the Security Council. All States should be given ample opportunity to shoulder the responsibilities of membership in the Council.

Therefore, we continue to support a comprehensive approach to the reform of the Security Council and believe that this process should be based on two main guidelines: a commitment to the overall concept of reform and the rejection of a policy of

taking small steps in one direction or another. The Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly — the only open and transparent forum available for the consideration of this important subject — should also continue its consideration of this matter and abide by its mandate.

The dangers that beset us all make it imperative for us to rally around the lofty principles established under the Charter of our Organization. We must translate our belief in those principles into continuous work that transcends greedy ambitions, hatreds, illusions and the desire for domination and hegemony. Our work must proceed from a belief in the equal rights and duties of peoples. Thus we will achieve the hopes of the peoples of the Earth and spare them hardship and suffering.

The path towards that objective lies in the commitment to United Nations resolutions and the cessation of attempts to ignore, circumvent or adapt them to serve purposes incompatible with the Charter and with law and justice. If we uphold those principles, we will all be victors. The only vanquished ones will be the forces of evil and aggression, which will be defeated by our peoples' hopes for a more just and secure world for all.

The President: I now give the floor to His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Prince Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to your friendly country, Saint Lucia, our congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly. I would like to express my appreciation to you personally and my full confidence in your ability to effectively conduct the work of the Assembly at this session.

I would also like to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, who led the work of the Assembly at its last session with wisdom and expertise.

I also wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to express the gratitude of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his continuous and tireless efforts to establish peace and security in the world, strengthen the role of the Organization, increase its efficiency, preserve its credibility and enhance its effectiveness.

It is saddening and distressful that this session is convening while the echo of the horrendous attack against the United Nations offices in Baghdad that took the life, among others, of one of its prominent and towering figures, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello is still resonating in our hearts. I avail myself of this opportunity to convey to the Secretary-General, to the staff of the Secretariat and to the families of the victims of this tragic incident my sincere and deepest condolences. I would also like to express the hope that neither this incident nor the most recent one that took place a few days ago will impede the efforts aimed at promoting the role of the United Nations in consolidating stability and prosperity in Iraq.

The hideous attack on the United Nations offices in Baghdad represents a challenge that can be dealt with and contained, and the necessary security conditions to minimize such occurrences in the future can be established. However, our Organization is, at this juncture, facing other challenges that are more serious than what happened in Baghdad, challenges related to its raison d'être and to the principles and foundations stipulated in its Charter. These principles were not heeded and the responsibility for this is ours. This has in many instances impeded its effectiveness and credibility.

Nevertheless, its ability to exist and perform and the contributions it has provided and continues to provide in various humanitarian, cultural and social fields through its specialized agencies are sufficient to encourage support for the Organization and provide it with every assistance it needs.

In the comprehensive speech he gave at the outset of this session, the Secretary-General referred with clarity and transparency to the growing trend towards unilateral action outside the realm of international legitimacy in dealing with current problems such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This expanding trend to resort to unilateral action on the basis of the right to self-defence could undermine the principle of collective security on which the Charter was founded. We stressed this in the Millennium Declaration that was issued by the General Assembly three years ago.

Nevertheless, we have to admit that not confronting such actions effectively and with seriousness and steadfastness when faced with dangers and threats such as those that emanated from the

regime of Saddam Hussein, have led, it seems, to confusion. This confusion has provided the advocates of collective action and the defenders of unilateral action with parallel arguments that each group is now using against the other. Whoever wants to criticize the policy of unilateral action will find no difficulty proving that such a policy could only exacerbate and increase problems.

On the other hand, those who criticize the international community for being lax in acting collectively to confront such problems that threaten security and stability will also come up with arguments to prove that such reluctance and negligence in facing challenges is behind the eruption of the major crises of our contemporary history.

It was therefore natural that, due to such divergence in views, a situation was reached wherein the focus turned to debate and theorization rather than to dealing directly with current problems and deciding on practical measures to resolve them. This is exactly what happened with respect to Iraq immediately before the war.

International terrorism, in all its manifestations and forms, represents a very dangerous challenge to our international Organization and to the international community at large. It deserves our condemnation which must be resolute, categorical and unequivocal. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has expressed this position at different forums and international gatherings.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has suffered and continues to suffer from acts of terror, has launched a relentless war against terrorism, enacted regulations that punish perpetrators, inciters and sympathizers with terrorist activities and has introduced counter-terrorism as one of the main subjects in the curricula of its schools. It has also taken a series of measures to close any loopholes in the way charities collect money, in order to prevent funds from being diverted for unlawful purposes.

However, regardless of its effectiveness, the international effort directed against terrorism will not eradicate this phenomenon without addressing its root causes and the reasons for its spread.

The Palestinian issue, which has become a constant item on the agenda of all the sessions of the General Assembly over the past five decades, continues to be a cause of instability and turmoil in the Middle East region, whose nations yearn for peace, prosperity and development. I don't think I need to go into the details of this issue, of which you are completely aware, but we should remember Israel's persistence in its provocative policies and practices, which focus on repression, persecution, political assassinations, settlers' issues and the ominous fence. This is an approach that has subverted all initiatives and proposals aimed at solving the Palestinian issue, including the Arab peace initiative and the road map.

The solutions that were presented on the Palestinian issue were harmed mostly by the Security Council's contradictions, especially among its permanent members, in dealing with resolutions in this regard. We see resolutions being adopted but remaining mere ink on paper, and when the time comes for their resolutions on implementation, the veto power is invoked to abort implementation.

The only way out of this vicious circle, from our perspective, is for the permanent members to pledge not to use the veto power when dealing with resolutions or measures aimed at implementing the substance of resolutions previously adopted. This matter may be one of the issues that the reform team proposed by the Secretary-General should consider in order to invigorate the role of the United Nations in handling current issues and challenges.

The people of Iraq look to our Organization to end the confusion, anarchy and chaos that resulted from the collapse of the previous regime. The major problem facing Iraq now is the absence of a clear vision as for the future of Iraq and the fact that Iraq cannot control its own destiny. Iraq faces a grave and complicated internal situation, coupled with a delicate and sensitive geographical location.

It is therefore of utmost necessity that we set a clear timetable that would assure the Iraqis that they are close to restoring their sovereignty and independence through an accelerated political process linked to specific commitments, whether with regard to consolidating the power of the transitional Iraqi Government or drafting a new Iraqi constitution that would pave the way for the formation of a legitimate national Iraqi Government under which all citizens would enjoy equal rights and responsibilities.

Based on this premise, my country views the Transitional Governing Council in Iraq as representing

a positive step paving the way towards this goal. While we give utmost importance to the role of the United Nations in Iraq, we are hopeful that any debate on Iraq will focus on determining its needs and finding effective means to respond to them, including contributions by all Member States to this noble effort, namely the stability of Iraq.

That must be done speedily, efficiently and in a way that would conform with the needs of Iraq. Iraq is a country of pivotal importance, geographically and historically, in our region. It possesses natural and human resources that qualify it to take a prominent role in the international community. All it needs from us is an initial push to allow it to regain its sovereignty, stability and growth.

The manifestations of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are a cause of great concern and tension in the Middle East. This means that we must declare the Middle East and the Arab Gulf region a zone free from weapons of mass destruction.

With regard to the need to increase the effectiveness and universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and its system of safeguards, monitoring and inspection, we also believe that certain standards and controls must be put in place to assure progress in all fields of the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Based on this, we call upon all countries that have yet to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to take the necessary steps to do so, especially Israel, and to submit their nuclear sites and installations to the international safeguards regime.

The international situation looks again as it used to be during the time of polarisation, including increasing tensions, crises and divisions that have paralyzed the Security Council. Despite the fact that we have entered the third millennium, we still lack the needed commitment and collective political will to translate our commitments into reality. International peace and security are still but a hope and an aspiration for many people and countries. Comprehensive development is still a dream for many and a distant objective we all hope to achieve.

In the Middle East, where countries suffer from these symptoms, we see in the ideas presented by President Bush, for the promotion of development in the Middle East many positive signs, which collectively present a model for fruitful cooperation between rich nations and developing countries.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince presented an initiative aimed at reforming the situation in the Arab region in the economic sphere, with structural reforms as well as expansion of political participation at its core. If the region succeeds in benefiting from these two initiatives, its future will be promising.

The fact that there are still chronic issues on the agenda of our Organization, like the Palestinian problem, issues of comprehensive development and the emergence of issues like Iraq makes it incumbent upon us to embark on two parallel tracks: credibility in upholding the principles of the Charter, and seriousness in implementing United Nations resolutions. We must not substitute futile and senseless arguments which would be useless to us all for practical solutions.

Our deeply rooted belief in of the important role that the United Nations can play in dealing with crises and its efforts to avoid the horrors of war and to provide means for international cooperation make us more determined than ever to support this Organization and consolidate its constructive role. We want the United Nations to take a greater role in handling crises before they occur through the implementation of what is known as preventive diplomacy rather than through pre-emptive wars, in order to preserve stability and maintain international peace and security.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ernst Walch, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Principality of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Walch (Liechtenstein): Let me first pay tribute to the commitment and the courage of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and all the United Nations staff members who lost their lives in the unprecedented attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. The date of 19 August is engraved in the consciousness of the international community and in the annals of the United Nations. We were forced to face a fact that we have not tackled with the necessary determination in the past: the vulnerability of United Nations staff worldwide. While legal protection can certainly not prevent an attack such as the one of 19 August, we must nevertheless provide the best possible protection in this respect. We therefore hope that the General Assembly will take the necessary measures to make the

United Nations Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel more effective.

The process that led to this engagement of the United Nations in Iraq constituted a major crisis for the existing mechanisms dealing with threats to international peace and security, first and foremost the Security Council. This Organization is subject to and dependent on the political will of its Members. Its distinctive quality lies in the fact that it provides legitimacy in accordance with international law. This outstanding quality it must not lose, and we are all challenged to stand up for this core function of the United Nations, which is a good part of its raison d'être in today's world. The crisis the United Nations has gone through in connection with the action taken against Iraq will not be overcome simply by adopting a pragmatic approach in dealing with the aftermath thereof. We welcome the ongoing discussions in the Security Council on a stronger and more meaningful role of the United Nations in Iraq. At the same time, there must also be a recognition that international law continues to be the foundation for our actions in dealing with problems of international peace and security and that the rule of law needs to be applied both at the national and at the international levels.

Like any other State, in particular small States, Liechtenstein attaches the highest possible priority to the rule of international law — expressed, inter alia, in our commitment to the International Criminal Court — and international relations that are based on rules derived from international legal standards. The United Nations, as the core body for drafting and adopting those standards, must continue to play its role in defending and upholding them.

It is more obvious than ever that the Security Council is facing a particular challenge in this respect. While discussions in the media, in the academic world and in think tanks after the military action against Iraq invariably have focused on the theme of the need for quick and effective Security Council reform, this sense of urgency was lost on the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council Reform — the very body that has the competence to make decisions on such reform. After 10 years of debate on this issue, we all appreciate the difficulties attached to it, and they are indeed big. However, these difficulties are not sufficient justification for our failure to resolve an issue that everybody agrees is a major obstacle to the effective functioning of the Organization as a whole. It was therefore rather disturbing to see the Open-ended Working Group continue engaging in business as usual, while the world — the world we are supposed to represent, after all — unanimously called for effective and comprehensive reform.

The composition of the Council is clearly a reflection of a geopolitical reality that ceased to exist a long time ago and enlargement thus continues to be an indispensable element of a meaningful reform of the Council. At the same time, there is also a clear need to address other issues, such as the mechanisms for decision-making and in particular the implementation of Security Council resolutions — whether adopted under Chapter VI or Chapter VII — and issues of legality. We hope that the initiative the Secretary-General presented last week will contribute to making the main organ that is at the centre of the world's attention a more effective and representative body.

While the work on Security Council reform has been slow and unsatisfactory overall, it has nevertheless produced some important and positive results. The Council has opened up to the membership as a whole and increasingly engaged in open debates, both on thematic and on other issues of concern to the membership as a whole. Liechtenstein welcomes this development and has participated in many of those debates.

This increased openness of the Council, however, does not resolve the issue of its accountability. The effectiveness and credibility of the Council will be much enhanced if it bases its decision-making on a dialogue with the States on whose behalf it acts. In the recent past, the Council has made some decisions that were controversial and others that were of unprecedented reach. Some of the measures taken in connection with financial sanctions impact directly on the lives of individuals who have no means of bringing their grievances stemming from such decisions to the attention of the Council. Since the Council makes its decisions on behalf of the entire membership and since their implementation is mandatory for all Member States, there should be ways for all Member States to express the concerns they might have with regard to such decisions. The appropriate body for such discussions is obviously the General Assembly, the only main organ of the organization of universal membership.

When educating people about the United Nations, we keep stumbling upon one issue: The need to explain that the United Nations is not identical with the Security Council. The fact that the Council is seized with the most burning issues and the most pressing international crises is only one part of the explanation for this fact. The flip side which we must no longer ignore is the increasingly futile struggle of the General Assembly to play its rightful role in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. An overburdened agenda, sterile debates, an overflow of documentation and the routine adoption of resolutions, that are but a rehash of past resolutions, have a combined devastating effect on the relevance of this body.

The General Assembly is today paralysed to a point that keeps it from dealing with the politically crucial issues and from acting in a quick and flexible manner. A good illustration is the resolution in which the General Assembly condemned the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Even though everybody shared the shock and dismay about this vicious attack, it took the General Assembly almost a month to adopt the said resolution.

The current state of the Assembly sadly plays into the hands of its detractors. Presiding over the General Assembly is a very difficult task, Mr. President. If you are able to lead this Assembly out of its established routine of paying lip service to its own reform and if you are able to initiate the radical reform this body so desperately needs, you will have created a lasting legacy, and we will support you.

Much has been said about the crisis in which the United Nations finds itself after this difficult year. However, every crisis is an opportunity, and I hope that the Assembly will take up its work in this spirit. Very rarely over the past few years has the public interest in the United Nations been greater than it has over the past 12 months. We must ensure that the peoples of the world continue turning to the United Nations as the place where established rules are upheld, new challenges are tackled and effective and responsible action is taken collectively.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fathulla Jameel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Jameel (Maldives): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to convey to you, on behalf of my delegation, our sincere congratulations on your election as the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. It is indeed an added pleasure for my delegation to see such a distinguished personality from a sisterly small island State preside over the Assembly.

Allow me also to extend my delegation's profound gratitude and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, former Deputy Prime Minister and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, for the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the fifty-seventh session.

I would also like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication and his untiring work in promoting the noble principles of this Organization. I also congratulate him in particular for the courage and foresight with which he proposed last week much-needed reforms to this Organization. I sincerely wish him every success in carrying them forward.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's sentiments of sadness and deep sorrow at the tremendous loss suffered by the international community in the recent terrorist bombings of the United Nations premises in Baghdad. I pay a special tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and to the other staff members of the Organization who made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of humanity.

Terrorism has always menaced the human race in one form or another. Yet never before have we witnessed acts of terrorism so organized, so frequent and so lethal, threatening international peace and security in its entirety. The Baghdad bombing and other violent eruptions elsewhere in the world grimly remind us that serious threats to world peace and security remain, undermining the noble principles that had so far contributed to the survival of the world order and to the sustenance of the values that we upheld. Much has been done, yet the persistence of such deplorable acts signals our failure to address the fundamental causes of those threats. Bold decisions need to be taken swiftly to address them.

Since my country fell victim to a brutal terrorist attack in 1988, we had tried, on many occasions, to impress upon the Assembly the threats to small States posed by increased international terrorism. A decade and a half later, the threat of terrorism is affecting us all, irrespective of our physical size, economic

strength, political power or military might. For some small States, the danger is graver, as a terrorist onslaught could severely threaten even their sovereignty and independence. Therefore, let me emphasize the importance of providing support and assistance to small States in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), and of strengthening their institutional capabilities in this important field.

We all should recognize that the strength and stability of the international security system or of any political order is determined by the strength not of its strongest, but of its weakest members.

Maldives will nevertheless continue to support the war against international terrorism in the spirit of contributing to enhanced international peace and security.

The structural impediments facing small island developing States such as Maldives are numerous. The geophysical characteristics of our island States, combined with their remoteness from major markets, have accentuated our vulnerabilities. Nearly a decade ago, we met in Barbados to address the environmental vulnerabilities and developmental challenges faced by small island developing States. However, addressing those vulnerabilities and challenges requires a meaningful global partnership, with shared responsibility and commitments at the highest level. My country hopes that Barbados+10, to be held in Mauritius next year, will provide an impetus for the international community to renew the commitments to concrete action it made at Barbados 10 years ago.

The globalization of the world economy and the liberalization of the multilateral trading system are continuing to marginalize the developing countries, especially the least developed countries. As tariff barriers fall, so does the potential for developing countries to compete effectively in the open market. Hopes were dashed at Cancún recently, as the Conference proved disappointing, leaving the developing countries still afflicted with problems.

Abject poverty and disease in the developing world exist at a level that defies comprehension, while deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis remain rampant. Development opportunities for the least developed countries appear bleak. I therefore call for a level playing field for all countries, with preferential treatment for the weak, and, in particular, for narrowly based economies such as that of my own country, who find it hard, if not impossible, to sustain their share of the global market.

My delegation believes that a greater commitment to the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries is a prerequisite if we are to halt and reverse the deteriorating situation of the least developed countries. While I express my appreciation of the donor community's willingness to help those countries accelerate their growth and sustain their development, and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it must be said that the Monterrey pledges remain far from being realized.

The overriding objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action to arrest and reverse the continued socio-economic marginalization of the least developed countries and to improve their participation in international trade and their share of foreign investment and other financial flows will also remain but a dream if official development assistance is not increased and international development assistance is not augmented.

As I have stated on many occasions, Maldives is not simply an island nation; it is a nation of many far-flung islands covering 90,000 square kilometres of ocean. Our islands are resource-poor, and the saline soil conditions prohibit most agricultural production. Transport and communication costs are exorbitant. The scope for economic diversification is very limited. That is why we have appealed to the international community to take a closer look at our true situation before the issue of our graduation from least-developed-country status is considered by the Economic and Social Council.

As I emphasized in my statement to the Assembly last year, the structural weaknesses of our economy could have grave implications for my country's development, should it be deprived of the preferential access to markets and the concessional capital that it has critically relied upon.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has fully recognized the special circumstances of small States like Maldives that are environmentally fragile and economically vulnerable. The CDP has also, over the years, highlighted those vulnerabilities and the severe costs that small island developing countries will have to endure in the event of their graduation. We

believe that, unless these vulnerabilities and costs are addressed in a concrete and meaningful manner, the conditions for graduation set forth in Assembly resolution 46/206, particularly that of smooth transition, will not be met. We are concerned that, if such issues are not adequately addressed, graduation will reverse the progress that we have made so far.

Although the criteria for inclusion in the list of least developed countries and graduation therefrom have been regularly reviewed and refined, they still fail to cover the entire range of structural and other handicaps. We are glad that the CDP is continuing its work on refining the criteria. We also believe that, of the three criteria for graduation, that relating to the Economic Vulnerability Index must be a requirement, if we are to ensure that a country will not lapse back into a lower category of development after the fatal day of graduation.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development profile of Maldives also highlights a number of circumstances not covered by the criteria. The profile very clearly states that graduation would result in an unsustainable debt burden, even if there is sustained growth. The rate of our economic growth has declined significantly since 1997 and graduation at the present time would therefore amount to a serious exogenous shock. This is precisely the situation that we are so desperately trying to avoid.

In accordance with the decision taken at its 2003 substantive session held at Geneva, the Economic and Social Council will soon consider the issue of the graduation of Maldives from least-developed-country status. We sincerely hope that we will receive the necessary support and cooperation of all countries with a view to adopting a comprehensive resolution that would address the issue of graduation in a holistic manner and require an appropriate mechanism to ensure a smooth transition.

In this connection, we would like to express our full support for the call by the CDP to convene an expert group meeting to address the issue of smooth transition. We also expect the International Meeting on Small Island Developing States, scheduled to take place in Mauritius next year, to formulate recommendations to guide policies on the graduation of small island developing States.

Following the glimmer of hope for the revival of the Middle East peace process, we are again witnessing an unprecedented deterioration of the situation in Palestine and the Middle East. We strongly condemn the Israeli move to deport President Yasser Arafat from the Palestinian territories, as well as the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. We have consistently supported the just struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable rights and to establish an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds as its capital. We call upon the members of the Quartet, particularly the United States, to ensure the implementation of the road map for peace. While we sincerely believe that the United Nations has an important role to play in the peace process, we are also convinced that the United States needs to remain actively engaged, as it currently is, in a spirit of sincerity, in the search for a just, permanent and lasting peace in the region.

The international community should maintain the high priority that it has accorded to disarmament and arms control efforts, without any discrimination among nations or regions, with a view to making the world a more peaceful place. The international community must strengthen and improve the enforcement of the non-proliferation regime. In this context, we believe that the United Nations not only must be at the centre of the multilateral process, but must remain the principal player in grappling with important global issues. We believe that, with unity of purpose and in a spirit of complementarity, bilateral, regional and multilateral approaches can lead to the resolution of these issues.

As the Secretary-General emphasized, the need to reform the United Nations to enable it to face the challenges of a changing world remains paramount. We are convinced that the United Nations, with its universal membership, is not only the sole legitimate body responsible for the preservation and maintenance of international peace and security but also a unique body, capable of achieving the goal of a better and secure world for humankind. We should never, therefore, allow the United Nations to be marginalized or diverted from its role or the principles of the Charter. Maldives remains committed, and will do its utmost to contribute to strengthening the role of the United Nations and to making it more efficient and effective.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Tolba, Minister for

Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Tolba (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, I should like to convey to you, Sir, our warmest congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am convinced that your great wisdom and wealth of experience will guarantee the success of our work. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, who guided the work of the previous session with great skill and ability.

I would also like to express congratulations and great appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and all his associates, for their outstanding and tireless efforts to achieve the noble ideals of our Organization. I would also like to express our satisfaction with the action taken since the previous session of the General Assembly, in particular the meeting in New York of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which addressed measures and priorities envisaged for implementing recommendations of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, the decisions of the Johannesburg Summit and the Millennium Development Goals.

I note particularly the efforts to facilitate access for poor countries to quality medicines to combat endemic diseases.

The hideous murder of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, together with a number of his closest associates, in the terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad profoundly shocked and distressed us. The increase of terrorism and its consequences in terms of fear and human and material destruction require the international community to step up consultations, cooperation and coordination and strengthen efforts to tackle the dangers that threaten all humankind.

Achieving the objectives of development, security and stability hinges strongly on how effectively we handle the challenges of extremism and terrorism. My country, while stating its commitment to relevant Security Council resolutions, reiterates its absolute and firm condemnation and denunciation of violence and terrorism in all its forms and reaffirms its support for all regional and international efforts and initiatives to combat this scourge.

Given the global nature of terrorism, the fight against it must necessarily be global in nature and be underpinned by an intellectual and cultural dimension based on the complementarity of civilizations and absolute rejection of any clash or conflict between them.

We also must not overlook the impact of imbalance in the development levels of rich and poor countries, since poverty and social, scientific and technological under-development are primary causes of tension and sources of violence and extremism.

There can be no doubt that maintenance of peace and security around the world requires a greater role for the United Nations and the strengthening of international law. My country therefore notes with satisfaction the acceptance by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government of the road map as submitted by the Quartet. This framework offers a fresh opportunity to establish a just and lasting peace in the interest of all peoples of the region, ensuring the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the decisions of the Madrid Conference, the principles of land for peace and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

My country stresses the importance it attaches to the demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and that negotiations be resumed immediately, as the only way towards peace and security in the Middle East.

On the question of Iraq, we welcome the establishment of the new transitional Iraqi Government, while stressing our concern for the independence of that fraternal country, its sovereignty, the safety and security of its people and its territorial integrity.

Regarding the question of the Western Sahara, Mauritania supports the steps taken by the Secretary-General and his personal envoy, Mr. James Baker, aimed at seeking a permanent solution that guarantees stability in the region and enjoys the agreement of all parties.

As regards the positive developments in the Lockerbie crisis, we express our satisfaction at the solution reached between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the parties concerned. We also welcome the lifting of sanctions against Libya by the Security Council.

Regarding the African continent, we welcome the establishment of African Union institutions and organs which will help resolve conflicts in the continent and respond to the aspirations of African peoples to progress and development. We also wish to express our satisfaction with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is aimed at enhancing regional cooperation in order to achieve economic integration in the continent. We are also pleased by the support given to this initiative by our development partners.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Mr. Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, is peaceably pursuing its course towards progress and development, inspired by the comprehensive and coherent vision of a societal project that meets national aspirations and offers real prospects for social advancement, modernization and openness within the context of a State governed by law, justice and equality.

That strategy focuses on combating ignorance and illiteracy, and on spreading scientific and other knowledge by promoting books and reading as part of a large-scale national programme entitled "Knowledge for all", launched by His Excellency the President of the Republic, to which, over the past few years, 3 per cent of the State budget has been allocated annually. That leading-edge programme, regarded around the world as one of the best cultural projects, involves in its first stage the establishment of 1,000 libraries in major population centres, particularly in rural areas, equipped with books and reference works relating to various fields of professional, cultural and social life.

This significant network of cultural institutions is striving to instil the habit of reading among all segments of society and within all age groups. It also helps to disseminate a civic spirit to promote sound thinking, combat ignorance — illiteracy and professional and cultural ignorance — in order to strengthen and supplement the efforts made in that area by the competent agencies. The implementation execution of that programme follows a participatory approach that offers the populations concerned and civil society organizations a basic monitoring and follow-up role. All the major societal forces have mobilized under the programme, and our citizenry understands its scope and the importance.

By opting for that strategic approach, our country is embracing a vision in which human dignity, freedom, equality and social justice, the consolidation of noble human values, the preservation of safety and security and social peace around the world and comprehensive, fair and balanced development are all noble objectives that can be achieved or maintained only through the total eradication of ignorance, illiteracy and cultural and intellectual underdevelopment.

The basic focuses of this strategy also include the protection of women's rights as a dynamic factor of society, and increasing the participation of women in the various fields of national life. The same is true of childhood development and the protection of the rights of children. In that context, appropriate legal instruments have been promulgated and a policy of development has been built around those priorities, which have accelerated the pace of human and social development indicators.

It has been possible through substantive reforms to launch private enterprise and to create a favourable climate for investment, despite the impact of the current world economic situation. The national strategy to combat poverty has made it possible to improve the living standards and conditions of the population, with the widespread provision of basic social services such as health, education, water, energy and telecommunications. It should be noted that those results could not have been achieved without a climate of security and stability promoted by a regime of pluralistic democracy that has eliminated all forms of exclusion, opened the path to effective citizen participation, promoted all individual and collective freedoms and given particular attention to the promotion of human rights.

The United Nations Charter reflects the common aspirations of the peoples of the world to achieve their fundamental objectives, including safeguarding international peace and security. The profound changes in the international scene call for the revision of the structural organization of the United Nations, in order to adapt it to the new realities and in keeping with its objectives. In that regard, it would seem pertinent to

reconsider the system of representation within the Security Council.

We sincerely hope that the international community will pool its efforts to enhance international solidarity and build a new international order based on law and justice, one that safeguards peace and security and guarantees a decent life for all.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Chairman of the Observer Delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We trust that you will guide the deliberations of this session with great efficiency, skill and wisdom. I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for having successfully led the deliberations of that session.

In addition, we should like to express our appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and for his commitment to the Charter of the United Nations with a view to enhancing international peace and security.

After the 1980s, Israel began unilaterally to delineate borders through the Seven Star Settlement Plan, initiated by Mr. Sharon when he was Housing Minister. The plan involves building Israeli settlements along the Green Line — the line of the old armistice — in order to obliterate the Line, which separates the territories occupied in 1967. Israel has used agreements as an opportunity to build more settlements, which now total 187 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The holy city, Jerusalem, has been subjected to an extensive Judaization campaign with a view to implementing the Greater Jerusalem plan to increase the number of settlers within Palestinian areas. Under that plan, land has been confiscated and a wall isolating Jerusalem from neighbouring areas is being built. Israeli settlers have occupied Palestinian homes in many Palestinian neighbourhoods. In Jerusalem, Israel has confiscated 70 kilometres of land in order to build bypass roads in the West Bank under the pretext of redeployment. Therefore, Israel has taken the first steps in implementing a plan aimed at establishing cantons, which, Mr. Sharon had planned long ago to isolate Palestinian cities and villages by building settlements and bypass roads to prevent any geographic contiguity among population centres in Palestinian areas.

The building of the wall is part of the Israeli policy of imposing a fait accompli, of exploiting security conditions to attain certain objectives by creating bantustans and enclaves and by isolating Palestinian villages from their surroundings, including separating such villages from Jerusalem. Thus the separation wall has isolated the cities of Eizariya and Abu Dis on all sides. All entry and exit into and out of these two cities is through Israeli military checkpoints. We condemn you, Israel, for such actions.

An article in the 10 August 2003 edition of *Haaretz* reads:

> "The Palestinian children who will be the next generation are being raised under extremely difficult circumstances in comparison with those who preceded them. They see only the ugly face of Israel; therefore, they will be consumed by blind hatred and a desperate desire for revenge."

Another article in the same newspaper this month notes:

> "Israel lays the blame on Arafat, after it forced him to win the chairmanship of the Palestinian Authority by democratic means in accordance with the Oslo Agreement, ignoring the fact that it must, first and foremost, do its part to alleviate the tension by giving up the occupied territories."

The article continues:

> "Can Israel ignore the regrettable fact that the European Union was among the majority that supported the General Assembly resolution? Israel's diplomatic defeat at the United Nations is the inordinate price that Israel paid as a result of a stupid decision by its Government — a decision that was no more than a declaration of its intentions. Its hope to eliminate Mr. Arafat is a stark embodiment of Israel's inclination to shirk responsibility and then to blame fictitious developments on the Palestinian side for the problem. Instead of taking the necessary action to calm the situation, Israel uses the working plans of its adversary as a pretext and then, should it fall short of meeting its goals, complains that there is no party to negotiate with on the other side."

First of all, Israel must contribute its share to settling the dispute — that is, it should make every possible effort to defuse the tension. According to *Haaretz*, there is a Palestinian ceasefire proposal, but the Israeli Government has refused thus far to respond positively to the offer. It continues to repeat its hackneyed position that an agreement is not possible while Arafat is in power and as long as the Authority fails to dismantle the terrorist organizations. Israel imposes those conditions without making any change in the general conditions surrounding the conflict. *Haaretz* continues to say that the world has despaired and wrung its hands in frustration. The Israelis do not express condolences when our sons are killed; they do not denounce such killings, nor do they even establish any contacts.

Before the road map was announced, the Palestinian Authority had been called upon to undertake certain reforms, such as drafting a constitution, creating the post of premier and transferring certain powers from the President of the Palestinian State and the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority to the Prime Minister. Chairman Arafat made many concessions to assist the Palestinian Government in carrying out its duties. The Government of Israel made several attempts, under various pretexts, to delay the declaration of the road map: first, it was holding the Israeli elections at the beginning of the year; then it was establishing the Cabinet; then it was waiting for the Iraq war. Finally, when Israel hesitantly accepted the road map, it rejected 14 of its provisions.

At the Sharm al-Shaikh Summit and at the Aqaba Summit of 6 June, the representative of the Palestinian Authority — who at that time was Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas — committed himself to implementing the road map, pledging to meet its requirements before President Bush of the United States, King Abdullah of Jordan, the King of Bahrain, and President Mubarak of Egypt. He announced the Palestinian Authority's commitment to a ceasefire and its readiness to recognize Israel within secure borders. However, in his statement Mr. Sharon refused to mention Israel's commitment under the road map to the vision of two States — the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that is viable and sovereign, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as expressed by President Bush. Mr. Sharon did not accept the immediate cessation of all acts of violence against the Palestinians. All that Mr. Sharon said were a few words regarding a Palestinian State without any mention of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine. Nor did he declare an immediate cessation of Israel's acts of violence.

Despite that, the Palestinian Authority, together with all other resistance factions, declared a ceasefire on 26 June. That ceasefire was to remain in place for three months. Regrettably, Israel continued its terrorist practices, and the Israeli army of occupation assassinated 86 Palestinians. To sabotage the declared ceasefire, Israel assassinated the political leaders of the resistance factions. The situation then slipped into tension and confrontation, one month after the ceasefire had been announced.

International reports state that the majority of Palestinians in the occupied territories now depend to some extent on food rations. In May of this year, the World Bank reported that the volume of international contributions to the Palestinian territories had grown: since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada, external contributions accounted for more than $1 billion of the budget of the Palestinian Authority. They have therefore provided sustenance to more than half a million people — the families of the employees of the Palestinian Authority. Those contributions staved off an enormous, acute humanitarian crisis. Donors who hoped for reconciliation had no choice but to make contributions because the Palestinian Authority's network of services collapsed and the living conditions of Palestinian citizens deteriorated. It is not strange, then, that the Palestinians persevere through international assistance.

However, this generosity on the part of the international community ultimately profited the Israeli enemy. International support provided a protective network through which Israel was able to afford an expensive occupation of the West Bank. Israel controls the areas militarily for free, without assuming any responsibility for the lives of the citizens there.

Fighting terrorism is an arduous task. However, we do not see anyone keenly seeking the root causes of or motivations for terrorism, nor even concerned about the international isolation that Israel is suffering because of its practice of State terrorism. It is as if the stifling Israeli economic crisis were a predestined, divinely ordained phenomenon. In the search for the culprits, Arabs and the resistance are held to be the cause of the crisis.

There was a real chance for the United States to embrace all the peoples of the world, not only through the compassion of those peoples for the people of the United States but also through the unified effort to fight terrorism. The United Nations should have seized that opportunity through a programme objectively and reasonably implemented, not by using cannons or fighter jets or by mobilizing huge forces to destroy a hated regime. The real reason for that was well known political and economic ambitions. The world was outraged at the military action, but it stood idly by, observing the consequences of the misuse of force.

The United States Administration expressed its keen interest in implementing the road map and establishing an independent Palestinian State. Regrettably, it did not, as a sponsor of peace, address the crisis with the required effort and effectiveness. It is not enough to stress the vision of President Bush or the commitment of his Administration to such a vision, while continuing to employ a policy of double standards. That Administration continues to blame and warn the Palestinian Authority. It continues to urge the Authority to combat the resistance, which they can see only as terrorism against the Israeli occupation, despite the fact that all international norms stress the right of occupied and colonized people to self-determination by whatever means. The United States Administration overlooks the Israeli leader's terroristic practices and Israel's failure to implement its commitments in accordance with the road map.

The shortcomings of the United States role reflect negatively on the peace process. They obstruct the process and make success very difficult, such as by refusing to deal with President Arafat, the legitimate, elected President of the Palestinians. Mr. Arafat is the only leader who has shown conviction and flexibility with respect to the peace process. As a result of that, Mr. Arafat shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by dirty hands in Israel in order to prevent the continuation of the peace process, spreading anxiety and doubts among Palestinian and Israeli citizens alike.

The Arab side accepted the initiative of His Highness Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz for the establishment of comprehensive peace with Israel after its total withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories. The Crown Prince carried that initiative to Washington, D.C., in his historic meeting with President Bush in April 2002. The initiative was based on the agreed terms of reference for the road map, along with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, peace in itself is not an objective for Israel. That will be true as long as Israel continues to receive all forms of assistance from major Powers trying to maintain their strategic interests in the Middle East region, and opts to settle issues militarily, outside the framework of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council.

Israel has laid siege to the Palestinian people. It has paralysed the apparatus of the Palestinian Authority, preventing it from operating. The Israeli army assumed responsibility for security. But how did it do that? By killing, assassination and destruction. What is required first is the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the occupied territories to the borders of 28 September 2002.

The Security Council should adopt the road map and work to implement it through the Quartet. The siege against the Palestinian people and their elected President Yasser Arafat must be lifted. The United States must cooperate positively and effectively to facilitate the task of the Quartet and to warn Israel of the consequences of obstructing its tasks. Deploying international forces into a buffer zone created between the two sides will facilitate implementation of the road map and the Palestinian Authority's task of maintaining security in the area from which the Israeli forces will withdraw. Those forces will receive complete cooperation from the citizens of Palestine.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.